



Responsible Tourism Education of Younger Consumers: The Role of Mini Clubs in Mountain Resorts

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Purpose – The purpose of this viewpoint paper is to discuss whether children can play a role in the sustainability of the tourism industry as a whole.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on a literature review of key terms: sustainable tourism; mountain tourism; children; and empowerment.

Findings – Children could potentially play a role in the sustainability of the tourism if empowered. Mini Clubs in mountain resorts could for instance contribute to their social empowerment using a catalytic strategy.

Practical implications – Practitioners involved in the sustainability of the tourism industry should investigate ways to make the sustainability endeavor of the industry more inclusive. As for academics, they should devote time for research on children as they are an important stakeholder for the industry.

Originality/value - This paper focus on children in the tourism industry. There is a dearth of research in this area.

Keywords – Sustainability; Children; Mountain tourism; Empowerment; Mini Clubs

Paper type - Viewpoint

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1. Introduction

Children are considered as important stakeholders of the tourism industry due to the fact that they play a major role in the choice of holiday destinations of families (Cullingford, 1995; Lugosi, Robinson, Golubovskaya and Foley, 2016), and yet, the tourism industry is not targeting them directly (Cullingford, 1995; Lugosi et al, 2016). As for academic research, a limited number of research in tourism (and cognate fields of research) is shedding light on children (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019 a, b; Seraphin and Green, 2019). Using mountain tourism, and mini clubs in mountain resorts as a setting, this study (Viewpoint) is arguing that the responsible tourism empowerment of children could be beneficial to different stakeholders: the children, the resorts, but also the industry as a whole. In a nutshell, this conceptual study is going to address the following research question (RQ): How could children be potentially involved in the sustainability endeavor of the tourism industry?

2. Literature review

Over the years sustainability in tourism has moved from being a niche way of thinking, to a mainstream philosophy that underpins the entire industry and cognate sectors (Page, 2019). Indeed, tourism organisations are no longer assessed just on their economic performance, but also on their social, philanthropic, and ethical perspectives (Okumus, Altinay, Chathoth and Koseoglu (2020). The growth of popularity of sustainability has followed the growth of the tourism industry as a whole (Page, 2019). The growth of the industry has been followed with the growth of related issues, which subsequently triggered the emergence of sustainable development and responsible tourism (Evans, 2020). Sustainability as a way of thinking and behaving in tourism is important due to the fact that unsustainable tourism growth has many consequences; among these are destruction of the environment, overcrowding of some areas

(see the contribution of Le Roux and Vegnuti in this issue); degradation of some equipment, inappropriate constructions, threat to indigenous cultures, overuse of natural resources, pollution, and others (Bowie, Buttle, Brookes and Mariussen, 2017; Page, 2019). The Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is suggesting the following for a sustainable development of destinations: limit growth; preserve nature; improve water and other infrastructure; encourage cycling, walking, and public transport; improve quality of life; conserve heritage; rehabilitate urban areas; and improve quality of tourism (Page, 2019). As a result of strategies to promote sustainability, new concepts have emerged, such as ‘slow travel’, which is associated with lower carbon use, a shift toward overnight train travel, cycle trips, as well as home stay (Page, 2019). The issues related to sustainability listed here are also impacting mountain tourism (Bourdeau, 2008; Dornier and Mauri, 2018; Gerbaux, Spandre, Francois, George and Morin, 2020), a very specific segment of the tourism industry (Dornier & Mauri, 2018) that will be discussed later in this article.

The hospitality sector has also been quite active on the sustainability front. The chain of hotel Scandic, for instance, is encouraging customers to use their towel more than once and is empowering staff by encouraging them to share ideas that would help the company to increase its sustainability level (Page, 2019). Innovation and investments are part of the ‘ingredients’ for the success of sustainability (Page, 2019). The event industry, which can be considered a segment of the tourism industry, has also followed the footpath of sustainability with the launch of initiatives such as the Green Meeting Guide, underlying the organisation of green events or meetings (Page, 2019). Over-tourism was one of the latest sustainable issues faced by the industry (Cheer, Milano and Novelli, 2019; Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019). Now, COVID-19 has taken over, and is threatening not only the tourism industry, but every single economic sector worldwide (Jamal and Budke, 2020).

Very often sustainability is defined as ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987 cited in Page, 2019). This definition suggests that sustainability should involve the current generation of tourists, namely adults, and the future generation, that is to say children (Cullingford, 1995). This inclusive view of sustainability is also supported by Okumus et al. (2020: 16), who argued that: ‘Sustainability includes elements related not only to the immediate stakeholders of the business, but also to the society at large’. At the moment, the society has designated as disempowered some categories of consumers, and among these are children (Hutton, 2016). The tourism industry and cognate sectors have done the same with children (Hertzman, Anderson and Rowley, 2008; Poria and Timothy, 2014; Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a, b; Seraphin and Vo-Thanh, 2020). The fact that children are being left aside is going to be the key focus of this study, as it is aiming to identify ways to empower children within the responsible tourism paradigm. This is important as children are the tourists of the future (Cullingford, 1995). Empowerment happens when a group or an individual attempt to gain control of their destiny and/or affairs by the mean of development of competency that is the outcome of a learning process (Joo, Woosnam, Strzelecka and Boley, 2020). As a result, the term ‘empowerment’ is associated with other terms such as ‘enabling’, ‘to make responsible’, ‘reengineering’, ‘mastery’ and ‘control’ (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2020; Boley and Gard McGehee, 2014).

3. Contextual framework

The image of mountains is closely related to nature, purity, wilderness, healthy lifestyle (Bourdeau, 2008). For some, choosing to live or going on holiday in mountain areas is all about getting a balance between urban and rural areas (Bourdeau, 2008). As for mountain tourism, it is mainly based on landscape and snow, particularly in Winter season (Reynard, 2020). The

development of winter sports (and snow parks) in the 1990s has tremendously contributed to the popularity of mountain destinations and mountain resorts (Pabion-Mouries, Reybier; Soule and Bourdeau, 2016). Those resorts are contributing to slow down the rural depopulation, and have increased job opportunities and more in general have favored the economic development of the area where they are located (Pacaud, Vollet and Angeron, 2007; Reynard, 2020). Among the jobs created are mountain guides, who are also to be seen as guardian of local cultures and traditions (Guyon, 2009).

However, mountain tourism, particularly in Winter, is challenged by many external factors, such as the relatively high price of accessibility, stakeholders' involvement and networking, cross-border partnerships, global warming, the decline of interests for this type of tourism, ageing of the world population, pollution and clean air (Arcaro, Gorla and Zublena, 2018), availability of water, that has been compensated by snowmaking and a general pressure for resorts to be sustainable. In other words, the issue at stake is to find a balance between the respect of the environment and tourism activities (Bourdeau, 2008; Dornier and Mauri, 2018; Gerbaux, Spandre, Francois, George and Morin, 2020). Because of the ecological concern around mountain resort, there is a call for more ecologically tourism strategy management of mountain tourism destinations and resorts (Varley and Medway, 2011). Customers, both local residents and tourists, are particularly interested in mountain destinations that combine beautiful landscapes, aesthetics and ecotourism recreation facilities (Bachi, Carvalho-Ribeiro, Hermes and Saadi, 2020; Osti and Cicero, 2018).

When it comes to mountain tourism, and more specifically winter sports, France is one of the world leading destinations (Bourdeau, 2008), with Iser a major destination in the French Alps (Gerbaux et al., 2020). However, new competitors are emerging, such as Caucasus, Himalayas, Everest Massif, mountains in North America (Reynard, 2020). That said, researches carried in Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland are showing that not all destinations

are at the same level when it comes to their engagement with sustainability (Kuscer, Mihalic and Pechlaner, 2016). Adopting a sustainable strategy could help mountain destinations and resorts to gain competitive advantages, and stand out against competitors, as sustainability in mountain tourism (Bachi et al., 2020) and in tourism overall (Osti and Cicero, 2018; Seraphin and Nolan, 2019) has become a pull factor. Beyond the environmental aspect, it is also important to think about mountain tourism in terms of contribution to quality of life of full-time residents of those areas and preservation of indigenous natural and cultural resources (Strom and Kerstein, 2015).

Stakeholders' engagement have been identified as a criteria for the sustainability of mountain tourism (Dornier and Mauri, 2018), and yet neither the tourism industry as a whole (Seraphin and Green, 2019; Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a, b) nor any specific sector of the industry such as mountain tourism is engaging children, for instance when collecting data on customers' perception. For some academics, surveying adults (parents) instead of children is a way of getting round difficulties (ethics, approval, skills) of interviewing children (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati and Brackstone, 2014; Osti and Cicero, 2018; Poris, 2005).

'You could possibly approach the parents to ask their impressions of the children's enjoyment of such a particular event (...) parents can very likely provide you with an accurate account of the children experience' (Fox et al., 2014: 104)

'Mothers were not describing their own view of fun experiences, but rather reporting the type of experience their children found to be fun' (Poris, 2005: 14).

That said, there is now a growing interest to hear children's view, epitomised by the following quote (Poria and Timothy, 2014: 93):

'Children's voices ought to be heard if the aim of the scholarly inquiry is to conceptualise the tourist experience more comprehensively and responsibly'.

The following sections of this study are going to address the issue.

4. Methodology and results

4.1. Overview

This inductive conceptual study is based on secondary data and uses case study as the main research method. As a method, case study is defined as: ‘an example of something, a unit of analysis’ (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 16), and can also be based on a variety of small examples (Brunt, Horner and Semley, 2017). Case study is also defined as ‘an in-depth exploration of a particular context’ (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 16), and as a method, case study is mainly suitable for small scale studies (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). Additionally, the results of case studies cannot be generalised (Brunt et al., 2017).

For this study, Club Med is used as an organisation for two main reasons. First, Club Med is the first company to have put in place resort mini-clubs (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a); second, because they are keen to engage children (locals and visitors) in responsible tourism through the Club Med Foundation (amifondationclubmed [Online]). In many of its resorts (including mountain resorts), such as La Rosiere, Alp d’ Huez, Aimee La Plagne (Clubmed [Online]), Club Med has created mini clubs, that is, service dedicated to entertain children while parents are busy doing other activities children cannot partake (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a). Club Med resort Mini Clubs are accommodating children age 4-17 (figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

4.2. Theoretical framework of the study

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to identify what is done by Club Med Mini Clubs in mountain resorts in terms of educating children toward sustainability, and (2) to provide further guidance in terms of examples of activities that could help those resorts to educate children.

The study is based on the following foundations:

- The needs of all consumers should be catered for (Burke, 2013)
- Individual experiences should be captured (Poria and Timothy, 2014)
- The voices of those who have long been muted should be unmuted (Poria and Timothy, 2014)
- Children are agents of change (Seraphin and Green, 2019)
- Using the right edutainment activities, resort Mini Clubs have the potential to help resorts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 4, namely ‘Quality education’, and SDG 12, ‘Responsible Consumption and production’ (Seraphin and Vo-Thanh, 2020; see also the contribution of Mauri in this issue).
- ‘Today’s children are growing up in times when environmental, economic and social issues are converging. It is likely that those future generations will consider responsible consumerism the only possibility or method of consumption’ (Sloan, Legrand and Chen, 2013: 226).

As mountain tourism is facing many sustainability issues (Bourdeau, 2008; Dornier and Mauri, 2018; Gerbaux, Spandre, Francois, George and Morin, 2020), and as the involvement of all stakeholders is important for the sustainability of this form of tourism (Bourdeau, 2008; Dornier and Mauri, 2018; Gerbaux, Spandre, Francois, George and Morin, 2020), it appears at this stage that resort mini clubs could be used to engage a disempowered customer, namely children (Hutton, 2016; Osti and Cicero, 2018; Seraphin and Vo-Thanh, 2020) in responsible tourism activities. Mountain tourism, sustainability, children, and resort mini clubs are therefore aligning (figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

4.3. *Methods, analysis and results*

The method used to collect data is twofold. First, a resort (in the mountain) with a mini-club is selected for the study. A Club Med resort was selected because Club Med is one of the very first organization in the hospitality sector to have developed resort mini-clubs (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019). Once the resort selected, the activities offered by the mini clubs are filtered through a framework or model developed by Seraphin and Vo-Thanh (2020).

- Stage 1: Identifying a Club Med Mini Club in a mountain resort
For this task, the Mini Club in Aime-la-Plagne has been selected:
https://www.clubmed.co.uk/r/Aime-La-Plagne/y?offer=last-minute-holiday-deals&productChildcaresLayer=0_0

Stage 2: Classifying the programme of activities on offer by the Mini Club using the three domains of knowledge for resort mini clubs' animation programme (figure 3) developed by Seraphin and Vo-Thanh (2020).

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

The activities on offer in the selected mini club are only contributing to D2, and more specifically SDG4 are all the activities are ski lessons. As an activity, skiing falls under empowering fun, and friend/family orientated fun (D3). The activities offered by the selected resort Mini Club, since they are focused mainly on sky lessons, do not enable children to learn about the local culture, and are not embedded enough within the tourism ecosystem, as would generally happen with the involvement of locals (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a, b). The contribution of this Mini Club toward the responsible tourism education of children is therefore

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weak to moderate based on the elements listed in Table 1, a qualitative analysis, adapted from a model developed by Silver, Stevens, Wrenn and Loudon (2013).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

That said, the current performance of mountain resort mini clubs in terms of tourism sustainability education of children could be explained by the fact they mainly offer one type of fun activities, namely skiing, a sport-oriented activity. Other resort mini clubs offer a wide range of activities: sport, friend, and family orientated fun; alongside, empowering, creative fun (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019b).

5. Discussion

As Seraphin and Vo-Than (2020) suggested, and as also suggested by table 1, to play a role in the responsible tourism education of children, resort mini clubs need to cover all three domain of knowledge. Practically, Seraphin and Yallop (2019a: 9) explain that:

- Mini clubs should have a local name and activities should be specific to the Mini club (therefore unique) and embedded in the local culture.
- Local produce should be served, and educational activities delivered by local residents should be developed around those products. Broadly speaking, activities developed must break the image of resort (and Mini Clubs) as enclaves.
- Mini clubs must play a role in family bonding and stress reduction
- Activities put in place in mini clubs must contribute to the positive image of the resort through all three agents (organic, autonomous and induced).

In addition to the sky lessons delivered by the mini clubs, the following activities suggested by Seraphin and Vo-Thanh (2020) could also be delivered (table 2).

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

The approach suggested here (keeping the ski lesson while adding other activities) is an ambidextrous management approach, or Janusian thinking approach. Originally called oppositional thinking, Janusian thinking is a reference to Janus, the Roman god with two faces who looked in opposite directions simultaneously, and also played an essential role in the creation of the world (Rothenberg, 1971). As a result, the Janusian process or Janusian thinking is a process that involves conceiving and utilising multiple incompatible opposites or contradictory ideas, concepts, images, or antitheses simultaneously (Rothenberg, 1971, 1996). Creativity and the development of new and valuable phenomena are the main outcome of this process (Rothenberg, 1996; Vo-Thanh, Seraphin, Okumus and Koseoglu, 2020).

The approach suggested should also contribute to the social empowerment of children by giving them clear signal that they have a role to play in the sustainability of the planet, and that their involvement is as important as the involvement of adults. In a nutshell this approach is establishing an equilibrium between children and adults (Boley and Gard McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka, Boley and Woosman, 2017). The range of activities selected that should contribute to the social empowerment of children are said to be part of a catalytic empowerment strategy. This type of empowerment is all about enabling people to engage in self-discovery (Adams, 2008).

6. Conclusion

Because sustainability in tourism requires the involvement of all stakeholders (Okumus et al., 2020), and because children are the tourists of the future (Cullingford, 1995), children cannot be denied any involvement in the sustainability of the industry. The strategy suggested in this

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study presents the advantage of mixing education and entertainment (also referred to as ‘Edutainment’). Mountain tourism should invest in the experience of children, not only because they are the tourists of the future (Cullingford, 1995), but also because this form of tourism is facing a number of challenges (Bourdeau, 2008; Dornier and Mauri, 2018; Gerbaux et al., 2020) that a younger market might help to address, and among these is that current customers are aging. Last but not least, sustainability requires innovation and investments (Page, 2019). This study is suggesting a long-term investment not only for the sustainability of mountain resorts, but also for the sustainability of the industry. Children are neither passive nor powerless.

From a conceptual point of view, this study has contributed to the dearth of existing research on children in tourism (Seraphin and Yallop, 2019a, b). It has also contributed to theorise how mini clubs in mountain resorts could contribute to the responsible tourism empowerment of children. As for future research, researchers could look at ways to collect data from children, who are very rarely taken into account in marketing surveys, as proven by the research by Osti and Cicero (2018) on mountain tourism. It is worth reminding the fact that children are the best informants about themselves (Poria and Timothy, 2014).

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About the author

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Table 1: Resort Mini Club domain of knowledge

Range of domains of knowledge	Strength of association
Greater than the 3 domains of knowledge for resort Mini Clubs' animation programmes	Very strong
The 3 domains of knowledge for resort mini-clubs' animation programmes	Moderate to strong
2/3 domains of knowledge for resort mini-clubs' animation programmes	Weak to moderate
1/3 domains of knowledge for resort mini-clubs' animation programmes	Weak
None of the domains of knowledge for resort mini-clubs' animation programmes	Nonexistent to very weak


Source: The author (adapted from Silver, Stevens, Wrenn and Loudon, 2013)

Table 2
Examples of activities for the animation programme of resort mini-clubs.

	Empowering fun	Creative fun	Family-orientated fun
SDG4/local context	Learning how to play a local instrument and/or learning how to speak a local language	Gardening activity (planting local seeds, trees, flowers, etc.)	Attending local events as a family
	Movie making of holidays	Drawing, painting, colouring activity of local crops or dish	Children and parents to be actors in the movie and working together to edit the movie
	Discovering within resort mini-clubs the local natural biodiversity and how to protect it		Questions/answers on the local natural diversity and awards offered to champions
	Learning within resort mini-clubs about the history and main cultural monuments of the visited destination and how to preserve these monuments		Quizzes on the theme of history and cultural monuments and awards
SDG12/local context	Cooking lessons (cooking local food with local chef)	Organising competitions related to dishes decoration for children	Events organised for parents to taste the food cooked by their children
	Blind testing of local food by children to identify name		Bonding activities (parents are blinded, and they need to identify the food their children are giving them)
			Family shopping in local businesses

Source: Seraphin & Vo-Thanh (2020)


Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes



Aime la Plagne at a glance

Rooms: 240
Room Types: Standard / Deluxe
Restaurants: 1
Bars: 1
Kids Clubs: From 4 to 17 years
SPA Facilities: No
Ski-in / Ski-out: Yes
Ski Hire & Locker Rooms: Yes
WiFi: Yes

4 to 10 years 11 to 17 years



Mini Club Med

Included activities 4

Figure 1: Mini Club Med of a resort
Source: Club Med ([online])

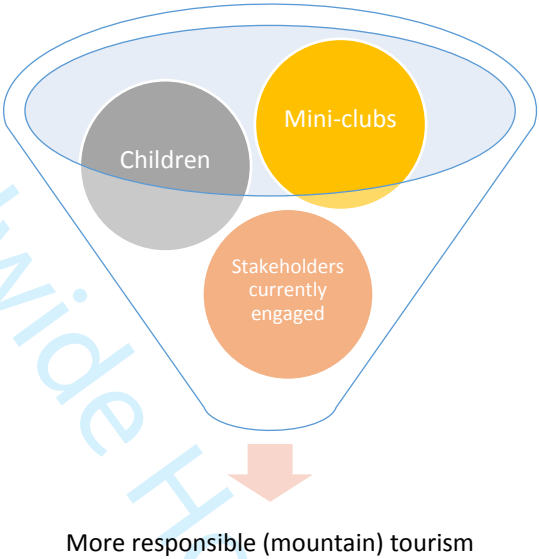


Figure 2: Stakeholders and responsible (mountain) tourism

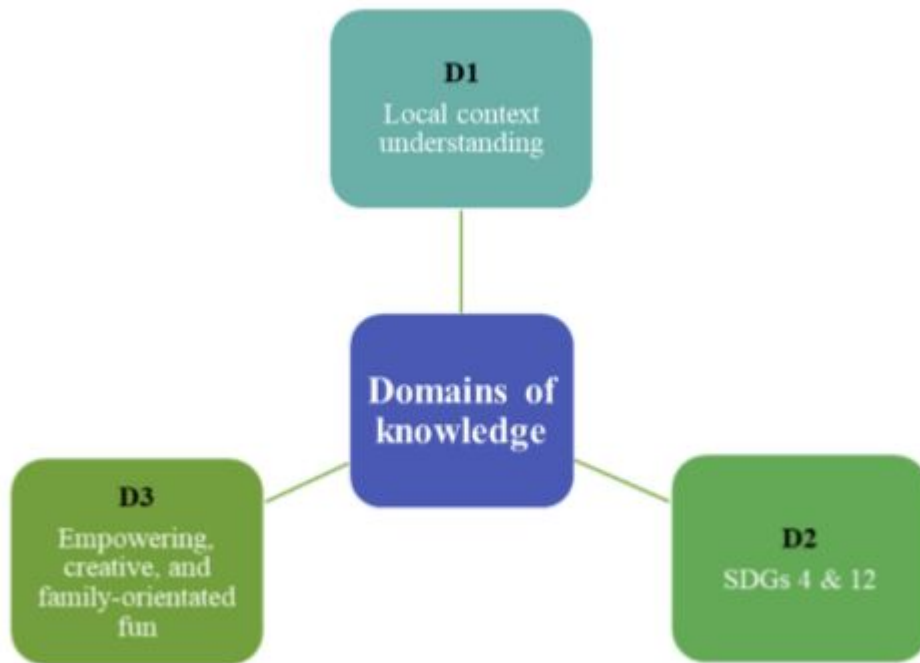


Figure 3: The three domains of knowledge for resort mini clubs' animation programme
Source: Seraphin and Vo-Thanh (2020)

D1 = Domain 1 (specialised activities focused on the visited destination)

D2 = Domain 2 (SDG 4 or Quality education; SDG 12 or Responsible consumption and production)

D3 = Domain 3 (Implementation of D1 & D2)